

February 21, 2007

To: House Committee on private adolescent programs

From: Russ Davis , Great Falls, Montana

Subject: Needed changes and oversight on private adolescent programs

Introduction: As a former Company Commander of Marines and a retired Regional Fire Management Officer I have been a close supervisor to many young men and women. I have asked them to do things that put them in harms way, but only in a controlled and highly supervised situation.

My son was in a private adolescent program in Trout Creek, Montana from June of 2003 until June of 2005. As far as I could determine, after looking at several programs throughout the Pacific Northwest this one was going to be best for him.

Several incidents that occurred in the program have changed my outlook on these programs. I have written of an incident with my son, who almost died of bee stings during the summer of 2004 while hiking in the backcountry, during the Senate Committee Hearing on February 9, 2007 (SB 288). Another incident happened during August of 2005 and I am now a firm believer in oversight, credentials and safety equipment. One of the young resident hikers walked out of the backcountry to report a serious accident involving another young boy. He was unable to tell anyone of the location of the accident. Life flight eventually found the hikers and the accident sight after flying different drainages in the area. This took time and could have made the difference in a life and death situation. Oversight and training can significantly change these situations. A simple GPS, map and compass training for residents and leaders makes a huge difference.

I am asking as a father and a supporter of young people for changes to improve these programs. Accountability will be at every level, you can support changes or not and all of us will still be accountable. The mitigation starts here, in this room. We can make a difference by strengthening these

programs so they are credit to themselves, to the residents they serve and the State of Montana. Lets make some small significant changes starting with the board of directors, making sure that these kids get the best possible chance to reenter society and make their contribution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russ Davis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Russ" and last name "Davis" clearly distinguishable.

Russ Davis  
3810 Lower River Road  
Great Falls, Montana 59405